

The Yakuts who live in the northern part of the Yakutsk government divide the diseases a man can have into two categories: such diseases which one may catch by chance and which soon are over, e. g. cuts sprains, &c, the healing of which is easily reached either by application of cow's butter, excrements, herbs, &c, or by setting the limbs; other diseases of inner organs, chronical ailments, nervous illness or mental troubles are considered to be due to a demon or spirit. Outwardly applied remedies are useless in such cases; they cannot touch the disease. Only the shaman (ojun) who has the privilege of being in contact with the invisible world is in a position to provide healing or at least relief for the patient. Slight diseases of the second category such as eye ailments (outward inflammation, abscess of the eyelid) may be healed by a single short invocation of the spirit. The shaman will recite his exorcisms for ten minutes and stare at the patient's eyes, until he suddenly spits into the latter's eyes. When the patient now is starting with terror, the evil spirit (abagy, abassy) will be terrified and flee from the patient who gets his health back. Man just gets a disease because an evil spirit, a demon, has visited him.

18: Priklonski--81 [2]
116, 614, 753, 756, 776

E-5

(no date) 1891

Yakut

It is, above all, up to the shaman, after being called to a patient to find out the name of the spirit in question, because every spirit causes only those diseases which are peculiar to his sib. He must, moreover, find out, what kind of sacrifice has to be offered in order to appease the spirit and make him abstain from his hostility towards the patient. For this purpose the exorcist performs a mystic ceremony before the couch of the patient. After having dressed in his official dress (kumà) he takes his drum (djugjur), which is his leader through the nether world and the seven heavens, and invokes the spirits of his dead ancestors and relatives, the spirits of mighty shamans. Through their mediation he goes down to the subterraneous world of the spirits, then climbs on strongly-turned ropes from one heaven to the other (which he reports in his mystic and ecstatic songs) asking whoever he is meeting: "who is the spirit that keeps my protégé in prison?" After a long migration he receives information on the permanent domicile of the spirit; finally, further devices are applied to get into negotiations with the found demon under the supervision of the protectors of the shaman.

Once the shaman has managed to get in touch with the spirit he persuades himself that he is standing in the face of him, indulges in high praises of his power, strength, and importance, makes honorable remarks on his own profession which culminates in helping suffering mankind and paying reverence and unperturbable devotion to the spirits and invokes the demon for the mercy of caring for his, the shaman's, protégé, of having pity with his torment and the disconsolate state of his family, and of freeing his soul which he, the demon, is holding in his almighty hands. The negotiations of the shaman with the spirit are not always successful; because much depends on the disposition of the spirit. The mediation is considered successful when the demon definitely states which kind of sacrifices he is ready to accept. Quite often it happens that the shaman persuades the demon to be content, in view of poverty prevailing the family, [82] with a minor offering and to accept the skin of a polar hare or fox instead of a foal or bull. The shaman then notifies the persons present of the issue of the negotiations, whereupon they give him the sacrifice to be done.

The shaman's endeavor is not always successful. He may not succeed in finding out the identity of the spirit who causes the illness, or once that he has managed to, he may not be able to locate him at a given moment, or, at last, the negotiations may have failed to bring about persuasion of the frightful, cruel demon, to appease him, to change his ire into indulgence. Unconditionally helpless is the shaman with pestilence and epidemics (dzan). The demon will not cease grasping the soul (kut) of the patient as a prey, takes possession of it, severs it from the body, and flees away with it. The patient's body remains unmoved and stops breathing, and unless the dreadful demon is propitiated before long, the soul will fail to come back to its former abode, the bodily frame will cool down and be subject to decomposition.

18: Priklonski--82

[2]

E-5 (no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 513, 761, 774

Sleep is the image of death. When the body is asleep, the soul has left him without, however, withdrawing too far. The same state may take place in cases of fainting fits, fever, and other diseases in which a man loses his conscience.

18: Priklonski--82

[3] E-5

(no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 764, 768, 775

After a man's death the soul is not immediately transferred to the realm of the demon, but wanders around the places where the defunct used to stay (especially where he has committed sins), through three days. The corpse, i. e. the body which has been left by the soul causes fear and shudder among those left behind. For an evil spirit dwells in the defunct, who by this fact alone makes the body impure, and makes so the tent in which the man has died. Traces of the Abassy's presence are visible all around in each thing. The family of the defunct therefore leaves the tent and emigrates to another locality or at most they construct a new tent near the abandoned one.

The dead are usually buried the next day, i. e. after the time necessary to arrange the burial. The corpse is washed and dressed in the best clothes: fur, fur cap, furred boots, and gloves; a pipe is put in the hand, and a tobacco bag laid near it. If the defunct was a hunter he is given bow and arrows; was he skillful in eviscerating animals and tanning hides, he gets the tools he used in his trade; was he a good bear hunter he is provided with a palma, i. e. a stick with a heavy iron end; with a spear or a hanger. A smith will get tools for boring holes (sugoltca), or a hammer (chtie). Every corpse is buried together with a pocket-knife (bygach; bys 'to cut'), an item no one would like to miss in one's lifetime.

It happens extremely seldom that the relatives bring the corpse to rest. As a rule there are certain people among the natives known as kjuvess, who dress the corpse, bring it to the burial ground, and bury it. They form a special guild of workers, a kind of undertakers with whom the family of the defunct agree upon a price, usually a cow, a bull, or the horse the deceased used to ride in his lifetime.

18: Priklonski--82 [5] E-5 (no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 758, 763, 888

Yakuts and Tunguses have a peculiar fear of sick people who are facing death. The others leave the patient to his destiny without giving him the least help. The inhabitants of the Sagastyr island in the Lena delta, for instance, destroyed their yurtas with the sick in them and settled beyond the stream on the Kytach island. The Tchuktchis have a custom which is a little different and highly characteristic of their lacking sense of family. When an old man notices that his strength is decaying and that he is going to be a nuisance for those among whom he lives, he wants to rid himself of contempt and asks his eldest son to send him to his ancestors. In compliance with a sacred duty the son then places his father behind a curtain to spare himself the gruesome spectacle when he pushes the heavy knife into the father's heart.

18: Priklonski--82 [6] E-5 (no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 493, 764, 767

After the corpse has been dressed it is taken away by the kjuvess (either alone or with the aid of companions) on a sledge. These wooden sledges, syyrga as the Yakuts call them, are of the usual kind which is used to transport wood and other things needed in domestic life. No new sledge is made for this purpose. It must be borne in mind that vehicles on wheels have not been in use among the Yakuts until thirty or forty years ago, and the use of horses before a carriage is even more recent. In former times those who could not ride on horseback, e. g. children or sick persons, would move on a sledge drawn by an ox, through the whole year. It may be no more than fifteen years ago that noble Yakut women, paying visits to one another, still drove on peasants' sledges which were covered only with rugs, at summer time. The sledge driver rides on the ox, holding in his left hand a bridle to which a wooden ring is attached. The ring is fixed in the nostrils of the ox.

The grave, grave structure, or grave-mound is made by the kjuvess. Various forms have survived to the present time:

a) in a forest trees with many branches are chosen which form a short-sided quadrangle. At a height of two or three yards above the ground some horizontal timbers are laid on the trees; and upon these timbers the hollow trunk with the corpse is put. Such a burial place is known as Arangàs. In cases of emergency the hollow trunk is replaced by a rough chest.

b) in those areas where there are few or no woods corpses are put on the ground [83] in a trough made of birch bast or a hollow lodje [RCH: i. e., wooden boats] (vytka), and covered with boards. The rainstorms of the spring and melting snow flood those vytkas unless they have been destroyed before by common and stone foxes and other animals living on corpses.

c) To avoid this, in the northern part of the area the chest with the corpse is set on wooden pegs which rise a little above the ground. The corners of the grave are also adorned with wooden stork figures, a bird which enjoys particular veneration on the part of the shamans. The stork helps the souls of the dead to rise to heaven, the abode of the good spirits.

d) The last sort of dealing with a corpse is burial in the ground. With spade and pickaxe a hole, rarely more than one or one and a half yards deep, is dug. The ground in the

18: Priklonski--82-83

E-5

(no date) 1891.

Yakut-2

116, 177, 764, 767, 825

Yakut area does not thaw deeper than half a yard; in the Lena delta it is only the moss which then is dotted with small pools, at the bottom of which is perpetual ice. The custom of burying the dead in the ground is certainly due to Christian influence. This is suggested by the fact that carved crosses with oil paint are put on those graves. The hole is then enclosed in a fence.

Fear of the dead sometimes reaches such a degree that all the inhabitants of a yurta may flee away before the man has actually died. Thus recently, an old, honorable man, who used to read from the psalter at the side of the deceased, told me the following happening which he himself had experienced: Two Yakuts had come to town (Yakutsk) to see him and to ask him to read psalms for a dead man and to bury him. They led him to the yurta where he found the dead man lying on the oron (Yakut word), i. e. on a couch or part of the couch, opened the door for him, pushed him into the hut and hid themselves somewhere. Nobody was in the yurta, yet it was obvious that it had been abandoned a short time before. After a while a cattle leg was thrown into the hut for him. It became night, and no one came to the yurta. However, there was some wood and water, and the psalter reader prepared something to eat for himself. The next day the door of the yurta was opened and a coffin in form of a square chest was pushed in. The old man was also notified that there was a sledge with the ox waiting outside. When at last the time came to put the corpse in the chest, to carry it out of the hut, to load it on the sledge, to drive to the place agreed upon, to let the coffin down into the grave, and to fill the grave up, it was all up to the old man. The yurta was situated in a desert where he could not find any other inhabited place or discover any person who might have been to him of some assistance; so the old man rolled the corpse down from the oron into the coffin placed below, pulled the latter out of the hut, tugged it on the sledge, and, after his arrival at the place of destination, he let the coffin down to the grave as well as he

18: Priklonski--83

E-5

(no date) 1891

Yakut-2

116, 764, 767

could. Not a single relative or friend of the deceased had come to this burial. - If people cry during burial ceremonies, they do so sincerely and without hypocrisy, or out of some calculation, e. g. : "To whom hast thou, o father and supporter, left thy orphans?" etc. As a rule they cry silently lest other people should observe them. They try not to talk of the deceased especially at dusk, in order to avoid the return of the evil spirit who has robbed the dead man's soul.

Before the rise of Christianity the Yakuts did not know of celebrations to honor the memory of a dead person, and even now they are still careful to avoid graves and burial places. In the neighborhood of the village of Kazačje near the mouth of the Yana river I had an opportunity to see the burial place of a shaman on trees, ten versts from inhabited houses. The trip to the burial place was very difficult to make. I could hardly persuade the people to give me reindeer and a guide. The coffin chest was entirely broken through the influence of weather conditions. Inside, I still found the head of the corpse with the hair; the other bones had probably been carried away by quadrupedes and birds. The small metal plates and jewelry I found both in the fragments of the chest and on the ground, and which were rests of ornaments from the dress, indicated that the defunct was a shaman as far as his rank is concerned; a hat buckle such as are worn by women made it probable that it had been a female shaman.

18: Priklonski--83

[3]

E-5 (no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 756, 766, 775

In the village I learned that only shamans had been buried on trees in recent times. In their lifetime their only concern had been spiritual affairs, so that they had to be buried somewhere nearer the heaven even after their deaths. This conception does not equalize the shamans to inhabitants of heaven, but only means that he must not be locked up in the earth who in his lifetime was connected with it only by tender ties. They were buried in the woods at an inaccessible place so that one should come near it as rarely as possible. Just as the shaman, as long as he was alive, had the gift to harm a personal enemy for personal revenge, just as well his soul, freed of the body, may trouble the survivors after the shaman's death. Not a single native, and not even a Russian born in the Yakutsk region would venture to approach the grave of a shaman or even to touch it.

18: Priklonski--83

[4] E-5

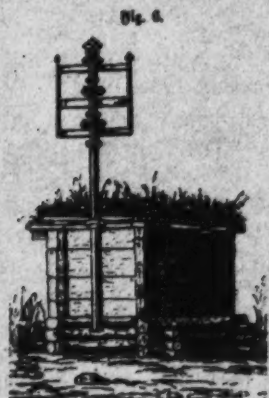
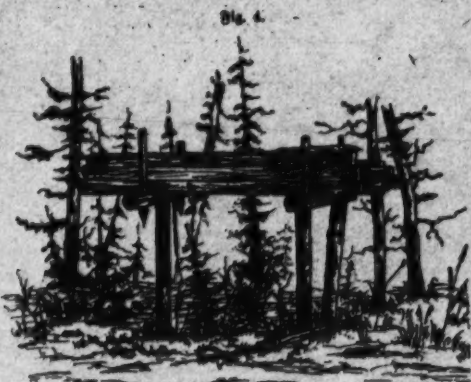
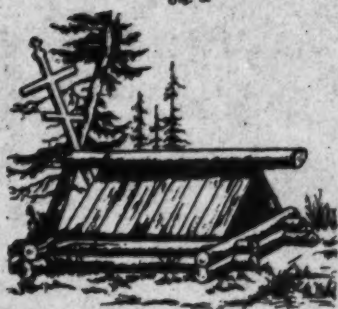
(no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 764, 766, 823

Graves in wooden boats (lodje) put upon wooden pegs I saw on the Sagstyr island. The corpses in all of the some twelve graves were so arranged that their heads pointed to northwest; they lay on the left side of the body. They were dressed and equipped as mentioned above. At their feet (with hardly one exception) there was a little dish filled with groats, and a small wooden spoon. Those buried in the boats had an oar and a scoop of the kind which is used by sailors to rid a boat of water.

Children are buried like adults, except that they are taken away on little sledges, and that they are left in the cradles where they had grown up and died. On children's graves one can still see their toys lying on the top.



Земельные Ограждения. По рисункам гравированным от Давиды Гринберг.

18: Priklonski--85

E-5

(no date) 1891

Yakut

116, 764

The sledge on which the corpse is carried, the shovel, the pickaxe with which the ground has been opened, sometimes also the wooden collar of the ox--all this was and still is left at the grave, sometimes cautiously broken, and nothing is taken home. A story has been told to the effect that upon the burial of a rich man his horse was killed and the meat eaten, but the harness left near the grave. But the natives deny this and other stories which are popular among the Russians, including the tale of the killing of the dead man's favorite servant to give him a servant also in the other world.

On the way home from the burial bunches of wood were kindled on the way; and the defunct's relatives jump across the flames in order to make themselves clean and free from the evil spirit who might have penetrated their clothes during the period of inevitable intercourse with their sick companion. Fire or the demon of fire, An-darchan-toen, or Al-^{vv}dt-iccitja is the protector of the homes and of all persons living under one roof. Fire makes everything clean, it affords warmth, it helps prepare food. The god of fire dwells over the stove, and has the appearance of an old dwarf with a white beard. When preparing a meal it is advisable to throw the first bit of it into the stove. The evil spirit is afraid of the fire; therefore, when the dead man's relatives jump across the fire they leave the evil spirit behind. When they are back, they commemorate the defunct, or rather they treat each other in his honor with meat, salomata, tea, and liquor. In former times they also used to carve a commemorative wooden figure, two or three sixteenths of a yard high, and to decorate them with hides and glass pearls. While this representation was to recall the dead man, it is also supposed to be the spirit who protects the soul of the defunct and the latter himself in the other world. This puppet, however, was not kept in the yurta, but in the choton (Yakut word for cattle pen) or even in a hollow tree, where it was supplied with some bits of good food, and its mouth was smeared with cow's butter or trainoil, to feed him and to secure his protective spirit's aid. But time which destroys everything removed also this puppet to substitute a new one for another

18: Priklonski--85 [2] E-5 (no date) 1891

Yakut-2

116, 372, 532, 764, 769, 776

defunct; and the old one had to be content with the second rank. Life asserted itself. Every day would bring new impressions, sad and agreeable, older events were forgotten, and memories of that kind have disappeared without a trace in the dark of the past, along with the memory of men.